

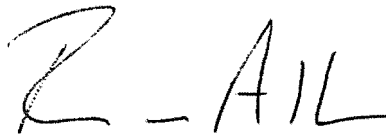
Christianity in China:
Examining History to Explore its Current Growth

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
December 2008
Graduation Date: December 20, 2008

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Abstract

In the last few decades, Christianity has become the fastest growing religion in China. This is interesting because of its previous status as a 'foreign religion.' Western missionaries were largely unsuccessful in establishing the religion as legitimate, and for hundreds of years Christianity saw a limited number of dedicated adherents. After years of imperialism and foreign abuse, the Chinese responded with revolution and seclusion. It was at this point, during the Mao era, that Christianity began to take valid shape among the Chinese. This paper explores this history of Christianity in China and discusses potential reasons for the large-scale changes in Chinese attitudes toward this foreign religion. I argue that through the seclusion of the Mao era, the rapid shift from a closed to open door economy, and the change in attitudes toward the Western world have all contributed to the large-scale receptiveness and acceptance of the religion. Christianity in China should be further studied to understand the previously mentioned dynamics as well as the role the religion will play in China in the future. I also argue that if Christianity continues to be religion of choice for mass numbers of Chinese, China will have an interesting role to play in global politics and economics as well.

Acknowledgements

-I would like to thank Professor Reuben Allen for advising me throughout this writing process and for checking my paper for errors. He helped me to think more critically and to aspire to a more professional form of research and writing.

-I would also like to thank Dr. Christopher Airriess in helping me explore my interests in order to pick out a topic and for his helpful research suggestions.

Why examine Christianity's history in China?

Christianity has a unique place in China's history, and it has become even more intriguing due to its shifting role in society. This history is one shaped from the beginning by a wariness of anything foreign, turmoil worsened by Western involvement, and periods of political and economic seclusion from the rest of the world. Christianity, being a foreign religion, seemed to have no place in main stream China when Western attempts to Christianize it failed on numerous occasions. And despite these failed efforts of the West and the government's attempts to constrain its growth, within the last few decades, Christianity has grown faster than any other religion in China (Yang 2005; Tse-hei Lee 2007). This growth has been made possible in part by the seclusion from Western independence (Sanneh 2006), as well as the Chinese people's ability to fit Christianity into their culture rather than the alternative— Westerners modifying cultures to fit Westernized Christianity. This development in China goes against the traditionally believed concept that Christianization correlates with Westernization. I argue that the growth of Christianity is unique in China, due to its history of anti-foreign and anti-Christian attitudes. I also argue that the history of Christianity has played a significant role in why Christianity is the fastest growing religion in China today. In order to examine the changing position of Christianity and its future possibilities in China, I will take a closer look at the roles Christianization and Westernization have played.

China, like so many great nations, has traditionally been a prideful nation; one of deep-rooted culture and ideals of sovereignty. No nation has successfully invaded Chinese lands and retained power for an extended period of time (Brown 1986). Therefore, when the West "discovered" China, they were mistaken when they assumed it would engage in trade for goods. The West wanted the valuable and exotic items that came from China, such as the fine porcelain, silk, jade, and decorated vases; China however only wished for silver. The Emperor Qianlong told King George III's ambassador in 1793 in regards to trade, "We possess all things. I set no value on things strange and ingenious and have no use

for your country's manufacturers" (Brown, p. 9). It seems that throughout the centuries, the world has been more interested in China than it has been in the world. By the middle of the 1900s, after more than a century of Western imperialism and disorder, the Chinese resisted with this same concept of self-reliance and pride (Sanneh). In October of 1949, Mao Zedong told the world that "the Chinese people have stood up (Brown)." Many of the missionaries in China had been there longer than the merchants and imperialists who had "wrought so much havoc," but because they sided with the West they were discriminated against, killed, and expelled (Breslin). In resisting missionaries and their foreign religion, China saw itself as resisting foreign cultural domination. This stigma carried significant weight for Christianity in its hindrance to the religion gaining more converts in China.

The wish to fight against all things foreign could be seen as paranoia, or it could be seen as fighting against a power that would have taken over it if given the chance. Evidence of this cultural domination or Westernization is extensive throughout the entire colonized world. The missionaries who went out to foreign lands to gather Christian converts were not taught to respect the cultures of their converts (Sanneh). They taught what they believed to be Christianity, but it was in reality Christianity fit within Western culture. This inability to adapt the religious foundations to the traditional culture has been argued to be the downfall of Christianity in various colonized nations (Brown). "For the missionaries, Westernizing and Christianizing China were one and the same thing (Sanneh, p. 121). The attempts by Westerners to convert the Chinese failed twice before the beginning of the 17th century when it was successfully introduced and maintained by the Jesuits (Brown). The Jesuits made great attempts to learn Chinese language and customs, which were critical to their success. As previously stated, even after this attempt, all Jesuit missionaries were expelled and many Chinese Christians were killed. The Communist government in China has been extremely forceful concerning religions since the Maoist Revolution in 1949 (Breslin). Before this history can be discussed in depth, however, I will take a look at how Christianity's place in China and the world has changed.

While the number of adherents to Christianity has decreased in the Western world in relation to total population—especially in Northern and Eastern Europe—numbers have risen in the non-Western world (Yang and Tamney 2006). While the Western world retains an important position in global Christianity, it no longer contains the majority of the world's Christians (Tse-hei Lee). In 1900, Europe, including Russia, and North America had a total Christian population of 423 million compared to 94 million in the rest of the world, 82% of the world's total. By 2005, Europe and North America's 758 million Christians made up only 35% of the world's 2.2 billion (Sanneh). According to Sanneh, this indicates a strong shift in numbers from the Western hemisphere to the regions of South America and East Asia.

This global shift is very relevant to Christianity in China, especially when considering China's history with the religion and the government's efforts to hinder its growth. In 1949, China's Christians—both Protestant and Catholic—made up nearly one percent of the Chinese population. Today, Christians make up five percent of the total population (Tse-hei Lee). Exact figures are nearly impossible to determine, because the government forbids private agencies from conducting polls on religion; however estimates range from 50 million (4% of the total population) (World Factbook 2002) to 100 million (7.6%) (Sanneh). This discrepancy is due in large part to the underground church, which is underreported for obvious reasons.

Regardless of exact numbers, it is undeniable that Christianity has grown throughout the last fifty years and at an exponential rate in the last two decades. This growth has also been unconventional in that it has occurred among the urban, young, and well-educated members of society; rather than the rural and impoverished, which has traditionally been the case (Yang and Tamney). This, along with the fact that the growth has occurred not only without the West, but in this case, in spite of it, raises questions that need further evaluation by scholars. Though there are many authors who have dealt with a number of these questions (Sanneh, Tse-hei Lee, Yang and Tamney), there still lacks a wide range

of opinions and studies about why Christianity is the growing religion in China, how the Chinese have made Christianity their own, and what the possible outcomes of China being a religious leader in the world could be in the near future. So while some of these questions need further research, an examination of the history of Christianity in China will provide a better understanding of the cultural, political, and religious aspects of this growth.

History of Christianity in China

Examining the history of Christianity in China will help to understand its role in China today. So I will briefly go through the individual introductions Christianity had in China and why they were unsuccessful. I will then go over the last century and explore what effects imperialism, nationalism, revolution, communism, and modernization have had on Christianity's role.

Countless Attempts to Introduce Christianity

In early Chinese history, there was no formally organized religion, in that Confucianism is based on ethical teachings rather than well defined creeds. Breslin mentions that the state was responsible for monopolizing the religious practices of society as the emperor was the pivot between heaven and earth. By the 7th century AD, invading tribes brought Buddhism; and Taoism spread among minority peasants as an anti-Han religion. This contributed to Chinese suspicions against formal, especially foreign, religions. When Nestorian Christians arrived in 635 AD, they were welcomed by the emperor of the powerful T'ang Dynasty; but without support from their center church in Mesopotamia, their foothold in China could not survive when the emperor persecuted both Christians and Buddhists in 841 (Brown). Evidence of Nestorian Christianity exists in the city of Xian, which was the capital of the empire, in the Nestorian stele and the Da Qin Pagoda (Thompson 2007). For centuries, Chinese culture thrived under Confucianism with art, foreign trade, and numerous inventions such as the first printed book.

When the Mongols conquered China in 1271, Chinese culture and all forms of religion were tolerated. The Mongol empire stretched as far west as Poland, creating a land bridge from Europe to

China. Marco Polo's journey to China spawned much interest in China, and Pope Nicholas III initiated an effort to carry Christianity to China (Brown). These Franciscans, led by John of Montecorvino, arrived in Beijing in 1294 and were welcomed by the court. Though they were able to baptize six thousand converts and erected centers in various cities, Franciscan missions began to decline, much for the same reasons as the Nestorians before them. They had not been successful in gaining mainstream respect, and were associated too closely with the Mongol invaders; thus, when the Ming dynasty took over in 1368, almost every trace of their work had vanished (Brown). It would not be until 1601 that another Christian mission would reach China.

With the European Age of Discovery and the Renaissance, the Jesuits were the next in attempting to "open China" to the world. In 1601, Matteo Ricci was able to establish residence in Beijing for himself and his associates, largely through adopting many of the Chinese cultures. Whitehead argues that Ricci, due to his respect for Chinese customs and culture, was able to adapt Christianity to Chinese teachings and practices (1979). The Jesuits were able to survive the dynastic change that occurred in 1644 when the foreign Manchu warriors crossed over the Great Wall and overthrew the Ming Dynasty. The Jesuits offered their knowledge of science and diplomacy in return for support and a plot of land which now houses the Nan T'ang Cathedral (Brown). The Church thrived under the Manchu rule during the 17th century with an estimated 300,000 Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries.

The 18th century, however, was not as successful due in part to the "Rites Controversy," which lasted nearly a century and divided and weakened the mission in China. Many newer Catholic orders in China felt that the Jesuits' position in the court was unfair and that they had lost touch with the realities of Christian faith as interpreted by Rome (Brown). Dominicans and Franciscans felt that the Jesuits had molded the Christian faith around the Chinese culture to the point of no longer being the same faith. In the end, the emperor was offended and felt threatened by the outside influence of the Roman Catholic

Church, banished many missionaries, and commanded all who remained to abide by the practices of Ricci. Whether or not the Rites Controversy affected the success of missions in China, it certainly helped to divide and further supported the Chinese court's distrust of external influences. By the time Protestant missionaries arrived in the early 19th century, Western practices in and China hindered the effectiveness of their proselytism.

Ignorance and Imperialism

With the West forcefully trading in ports such as Canton (Guangzhou) for “exotic” goods, the Chinese were as wary as ever of these foreigners who seemed to push their way inland and traded by their own rules. When China demanded silver for its exports, Western nations smuggled opium into the ports instead of giving up more silver. Breslin argues that as domestic struggles began to take a toll on the country, opium began to take hold on the struggling elite and officials. This was exactly what Britain had planned for, which shifted the power and profits from China to the West. In 1836, the British imported \$17,000,000 worth of Chinese tea and silk and sold \$18,000,000 worth of opium (Breslin). With opium use, corruption became even more predominant, which led to more smuggled opium, even with the imperial ban that was put in place in hopes of controlling of the social epidemic. The delicate balance between officials, members of the lower classes, and foreign merchants began to disintegrate, hostilities grew, and the imperial government could do little about the West's hold on trade. In 1839, there were complaints when Manchu officials detained three hundred and fifty foreign traders in Canton until they agreed to give up their cargoes of opium—twenty thousand chests of opium were publically burned (Brown 1986). This, along with allegations of cruel punishments against British subjects, gave Britain an excuse to settle the issue with force.

Being unprepared for the naval attacks at Canton and along the coast, the Manchu dynasty quickly asked for peace. The first of these Opium War or “unequal” treaties was signed in 1842, which first, opened five treaty ports to British residence and trade, second, ceded Hong Kong to the British,

third, granted British subjects extraterritoriality in the treaty ports, and fourth, paid an indemnity for the confiscated opium and the cost of the war (Brown). Throughout this time, Catholic missionaries worked illegally in the interior and Protestant missionaries became involved with the Hakka Chinese who staged the nearly successful Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s (Breslin). According to Breslin, this caused the Chinese to further identify Christians with foreign invaders and native rebels, which reinforced the Confucian distrust of organized religion. A second, and even less justified war was initiated by Britain and France in 1856. The results from this treaty were first that another port, Taiwan, was opened for trade, second that foreigners were permitted to travel outside the treaty ports, third that an indemnity was paid for the cost of the war, and fourth missionaries and converts were to be tolerated throughout the empire (Brown). The Chinese empire's supremacy was challenged throughout the 19th century and was further humiliated as foreign powers continued to make demands the empire was unable to refuse. In the 1860s China was not only dealing with the results of the "unfair treaties," but also was forced into war with Japan over Korea, which had been a Chinese protectorate. China was no match for Japan, a rising world power, and lost Korea and Taiwan to the Japanese in the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895. With the weakened state of the empire, a group of reformers were able to convince the young emperor, Guangxu, to pass a series of reforms in 1898. These reforms were aimed at adopting Western policies and technology, while at the same time, retaining Chinese traditions. The Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi and her conservative followers arranged a coup, detained the emperor and repealed the edicts (Brown). In addition to the imperial government, various groups began opposing the Western foreigners when the masses had experienced enough exploitation by foreign merchants and missionaries.

Nationalism and Civil War

In addition to the mistreatment from the imperialists and merchants, many missionaries' actions were seen as exploitative by the Chinese. Missionaries attempted to eradicate the Chinese tradition of focusing on community because of their beliefs that stressed the importance of individual decisions,

argues Breslin. The Jesuits also attempted to remove the leading roles females had in some established Catholic Churches and replaced them with male European laity. The exploitative nature of some missionaries coupled with issues previously mentioned regarding foreign merchants contributed to the rise of anti-foreignism, which in turn led to the growth of Chinese nationalism. The issue of imperialism, with Christianity tied closely to it, fueled hatred among the Chinese masses. In 1900, the Boxer Uprising erupted, in which 230 Western missionaries (Sanneh) and 30,000 Chinese Christians (Brown) were among those killed. Disdain grew toward the Qing Empire after years of not being able or willing to take decisive action against the foreign powers; and so the armies of the empire revolted in 1911 to form a republic. This was led by Sun Yat-sen, now known as the “founder of modern China”. The republic never completely controlled China, being made up of a corrupt coalition of warlords who fought among themselves (Breslin). The period from 1911 to 1927 was a time in which nationalists and communists united together in the common cause of nationalism and anti-foreignism, under the Kuomintang (KMT) party. After Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, the two groups fell apart due to their significant differences. The communists split off from the nationalists and formed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Chiang Kai-shek took control of the nationalist government; and the next two decades were characterized by the struggle between the KMT and the CCP, corruption, and war.

Previous to the break out of the Second Sino-Japanese war in 1937, China and Japan had a history of fighting for northern regions such as Korea and Manchuria. Japan wanted Chinese lands to tap into the vast resources, and both countries had refrained from declaring an outright war until Japan took Manchuria and pushed further into the mainland (Jowett 2005). With the nation already in chaos, this only reinforced the Chinese frustration with and distrust of foreigners. After the break of the CCP with the KMT, the CCP ordered attempts all over the country to organize uprisings in order to seize control. One of these uprisings was led in Hunan by Mao Zedong; it was a failure and he barely escaped with his life. He then gathered as many supporters among the peasantry as possible and hid in the

mountains near Hunan to organize the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry (Brown, p. 51).”

After the Red Army was organized, their base was attacked by the Nationalist armies in October of 1934. The legendary Long March began when a body of approximately 100,000 escaped and retreated to the south. Though this trek through harsh, desolate landscapes took 370 days and claimed 90,000 lives, they were able to practice guerilla warfare against both the Nationalist and Japanese armies (Breslin). When Japan suddenly sued for peace after the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, both Nationalists and Communists struggled for power over the government and the people. Civil war broke out between the two in 1947, with the aide of the Soviets going to the Communists and the United States helping the Nationalists. As cities began to fall to the Red Armies, Chiang Kai-shek and his government fled to Taiwan.

Mao's Revolution

The Communists had taken complete control of the country; and on October 1 of 1949, Mao Zedong initiated the People's Republic of China, bringing an end to over a century of embarrassment at the hands of the West. Mao saw the West's missionary attempts to be closely tied to its arrogance and perfidy, acts he demanded to be avenged. He recalled that the missionaries applauded the “unequal treaties” as God's will, proving that the religion was not for the Chinese people but a foreign religion utilized as a method to blind and control the people.

As all religion was denounced as “the opiate of the people,” the government attempted to assimilate all Christian institutions to better align with socialist goals (Tse-hei Lee). The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was put into place to legitimize the state's takeover of the Church. Its goals were to make the Chinese Church self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating; in essence, its fundamental goal was to force Chinese Christians to sever their ties with foreign missionaries and foreigners as well (Yang 2005). All missionaries were forced to leave the country and by 1952, the

missionary era in China was ended. Non-compliant Christian leaders were sent to labor camps or executed, while all Christians were forced to attend union services controlled by the government. The most intense period of persecution was during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution which began in 1966 (Sanneh, Brown).

With the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, all churches, along with all venues of other religions, were shut down. The main goal was to eradicate all religions, as these were seen as the carriers of traditions and old beliefs. Tactics like purging and burning religious and educational centers were used in order to eliminate the “four olds”—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits (Yang). Those who participated in these activities, or Red Guards, were made up of 17 million youth. Public burnings of religious and traditional symbols was common. They attacked the site of the ancient Nestorian Stele of 781 and destroyed the main building of the Da Qin monastery. According to Sanneh, by 1968, the extremism of the Red Guards proved difficult for even Chairman Mao to control. Mao and other leaders began to realize the extent of the destruction their propaganda had initiated in 1969 when Mao took an inspection trip to central China. It was difficult for the party to rein in the young revolutionaries, and according to some observers, it took until 1976 to fully bring matters under control (Sanneh). In 1976, Chairman Mao died and his cohorts, known as the “Gang of Four,” who had supported many of the extreme actions against religious and educational institutions, were arrested. In 1977, Deng Xiaoping was appointed vice premier and initiated a new era of modernization.

Rapid Modernization

Deng Xiaoping declared that the government would begin to ease restriction on religion and compensated for properties seized and wrongs committed. Though the churches were still controlled by the government—the China Christian Council—and the church leaders were still to abide by governmental regulation, buildings were rebuilt and believers were protected under Article 36 which was added to the constitution in 1982. While the extremism of the Cultural Revolution was very

destructive and had disastrous consequences for those involved, it seemed to push the government to take an interest in religious freedoms. By 1986 the government initiated a number of official endorsements. In reaction to the quick transformation by the government, individuals were not only more receptive toward Christianity, many decided to convert. Along with more sympathetic policies toward religion, known as the “open door” policies, Xiaoping initiated the Four Modernizations, which comprised of reforms in the areas of agriculture, industry, technology, and national defense (Brown). The government also took a more open attitude toward the West. In a matter of a century, China had gone from a closed, deprived nation to one of openness and determination to become a world leader.

Characteristics of a Revolutionized Christianity

Throughout the 20th century, even though Christianity was nearly eradicated more than once, the fact that it survived has proven to have significant implications for the future of China. Its exponential growth occurred largely without help or intervention by Western powers. Despite China’s history prior to the late 20th century, which resulted in resistance against Christianity, it was able to persist and eventually become the fastest growing religion in modern-day China. Scholars have theorized on the reasons Christianity has become the religion of contemporary China, and I will discuss some of them in this section.

Survival throughout the Mao Era

Due to the rapid increase in the Chinese population during the early to mid-1900s, the percentage of Chinese adherents did not increase; but the actual numbers did (Yang 2005). The reason for this is due in large part to the rural, secluded Catholic villages. Those Chinese who had been converted in the early 18th and 19th centuries by missionaries remained endogamous and excluded from the rest of China. Wang and Tse-hei Lee suggest that local culture—a combination of Catholic belief with fengshui—is the underlying reason Catholicism was able to continue in these villages (2006). Where it seemed that Catholicism had been largely exterminated in the midst of the many anti-religious

movements and events spanning from the 18th through the 20th centuries, it was merely pushed underground. Wang stresses the importance of the concurrence of hierarchical authority in Catholicism with ancestor worship in Chinese culture, which helped to imbed the basic Catholic beliefs into the daily traditions of Chinese families (2006). In firmly planting these Catholic beliefs into daily life, Catholic families were able to worship during the Cultural Revolution with little difficulty. Catholics were able to worship and observe religious rituals at home and in community with the family, rather than in a public place of worship (Tse-hei Lee 2007). “When Christianity became a family religion, Jesus publicly replaced the ancestor as the focus of worship and created a new religious and social identity to hold different generations of a Christian family together (Tse-hei Lee, p. 287).”

In spite of the government’s persecution, Christian families adapted and converted through social hierarchy. Christian patriarchs, generally older men and women, instructed the younger members of the family in the faith (Tse-hei Lee). The significant increase in population throughout the 19th and 20th centuries aided the growth and survival of Christianity. While Catholicism had the largest number of continual Christian adherents until the mid-1900s, it was not the only form of Christianity to survive during times of suppression. There were a select number of Protestant churches that went underground as well, though they were not necessarily passed down from generation to generation in tight-knit families like the Catholic adherents (Yang 2005). So while small groups of previously converted Chinese Christians remained throughout times such as the Cultural Revolution, there was no active conversion among the Chinese. In recent years, beginning around the early 1980s, there has been an internal, self-perpetuating growth in numbers of Christian adherents.

Receptiveness after the Mao Era

Though the government still had, and continues to have, a significant amount of control over public churches’ affairs throughout the country after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, churches were opened and religious leaders were reinstated to their positions. Many scholars theorize that some of the initial

growth of Christianity in the 1980s was a reaction to the difficult times—war, corruption, foreign abuses, and persecution—previously experienced (Yang, Tse-Hei Lee, Brown, Sanneh). While this seems to hold only slight importance in comparison to other reasons later explored, it is argued that the emotional distress of the Chinese throughout the past century had made it more urgent for them to seek solace in a new system of thought; and Christianity was becoming more readily available to those seeking something different.

Many scholars agree that the Chinese were able to take Christianity, a religion previously associated with foreign exploitation, place it within the context of traditional Chinese culture and beliefs, and use it to help them deal with past suffering and current uncertainty (Treadgold 1971, Yang 2005, Tse-hei Lee). Traditional Chinese culture has constantly remained intact; though challenged and morphed at times, it has remained fundamentally Chinese. Treadgold mentions that after analyzing Chinese history, he observed that tradition and culture always reasserted itself—despite invasions by barbarians, Manchus, Japanese, and the West or even throughout the Cultural Revolution when the Red Guards attempted to wipe out old ideologies and customs through force (p. 196).

The endurance of Chinese culture remained throughout the aforementioned events; and the Chinese shaped Christianity to fit into their culture, rather than allowing Christianity to be forced upon them which would have consequently altered their traditional culture and ideologies. Through this, the Chinese were able to reach regions and people who had before been inaccessible to foreign missionaries. “Their commitment to the Christian faith, their active involvement in evangelization and church implantation, and their willingness to share with others the gospel message helped to spread Christianity into areas not formerly reached by foreign missionaries (Tse Hei Lee, p.303).” Yang argues that present day evangelistic missions are more of a response to the growing interests in Christianity rather than the cause of Christian growth. Institutional resources are barely keeping up with the increasing demand, which is perhaps one of the reasons for the thriving Christian movements (2005, p

431). So while Chinese churches were left to be self-sustained for periods before the mid-1900s and then indefinitely after 1952, this was one of the reasons the Chinese were able to take Christianity and make it their own (Brown). They were left to read, discuss, and teach the Bible themselves, and were therefore forced to interpret it within their own cultural understandings.

Recent Decades: Outside Influences

Over the last twenty years, the increasingly open market economy has created rapid societal changes and has quite literally “pushed” many people into the global market. Amid these rapid and dramatic changes, Yang argues that social norms have broken down, conflicting moral values have been entangled, and corruption has become widespread (2005, p.432). With the newly created options of participating in privately-owned businesses and transnational companies, people have also lost their sense of security (Yang). In the swiftly transforming economy, people have been seeking security and peace, and material security is included in this; therefore, they respond wholeheartedly to the Christian message that promises blessings in this life and the next (Tse-hei Lee). Many anxious Chinese have converted to Christianity in hopes that their lives will be blessed. They do not view the religion as traditional or restrictive such as in the Western world, they see it as progressive, liberating, modern, and universal. “For Chinese converts, Christianity is a faith that provides peace, certainty, and liberation amid bewildering market forces and a stifling political atmosphere (Yang 2005).” The view that Christianity can provide security and blessings in this life is quite identical to the Western view (Treadgold). While seeking security and peace for themselves in Christianity, there is also an aspect of needing salvation from the chaos and corruption that drives the global economy. Sanneh mentions that Chinese Christians recognize the contrast between the values of the Gospel and the “new Chinese” values of making money and gaining more possessions (p. 117). The government’s one-child policy also contributes to these changing Chinese values of individualism, which fuels the responsiveness toward Christianity’s message of individual salvation and a personal relationship with God (Sanneh).

Jia Gu mentions that with China's rapid modernization, with cars replacing bicycles, fast food replacing traditional snacks, and individualism replacing loyalty to the party, religion fills a cultural and moral void (2006, p.39). Consequent arguments that are supported by many scholars are that the Chinese are seeking modernity, Christianity is viewed as modern, and that it provides solace in the confusion of a modern economy (Tse-hei Lee, Yang, Sanneh, Wang, and Hall 2006). Prosperity and modernity in America, along with Christianity being the majority religion, causes the Chinese to perceive Christianity as being modern as well. Many younger, well-educated Chinese experience this modernity when dealing with the global market. As more and more educated Chinese enter the open market, dealing with American and Western businesses, they gain more experience with the varying cultures and ways of living in comparison to their own. They see overlaying characteristics of the American people's culture as Christian, prosperous, and "modern," and they therefore use the United States as an excellent model (Hall). Unlike many colonized and third-world countries in the past, China's adoption of Christianity is among a vast array of age groups with varying socioeconomic standings. A large portion of the newly converted Christians are the young professionals in thriving urban areas (Tse-hei Lee and Yang).

Tse-hei Lee mentions that many Chinese intellectuals are converted by their peers at universities; while Yang mentions that many businesspeople are converted at urban and "modern" locations such as McDonalds in cities all over the country. While many Chinese Christians reside in rural areas, there is a large, growing portion of the Christian population in the urban areas. Churches all over the country are filled each service—they can sometimes have up to five services in one weekend to accommodate the numbers—with rich, poor, young, old, families, students, farmers, and CCP officials (Yang 2005, Tse-hei Lee). Along with having contact with Americans in business relations, many Americans have come to China in the last twenty years as teachers of English.

The demand for learning English is large, so it is relatively easy to be accepted as a professor on a university campus. Many missionaries have been able to teach about Christianity in their classes, which reach students from all over the country who will have contact with all types of people (Brown). The missionaries who go to China to evangelize have been a factor to the growth in university settings, especially in the more rural areas; but this has not been a vital factor to the overall growth of Christianity in China (Tse-hei Lee). In relation to this factor, many “underground” churches had been started by either “undercover” missionaries or Chinese who wished to be free of the governmental regulations over the churches. Due to the unreported nature of the underground church, it is difficult for researchers to find an exact number of adherents to Protestantism. The official count by the government in the 1990s was at 14 million; however, Yang argues that there are at least another 35 to 65 million more due to the underground church (2005, p.427). If this is so, there has been a growth of 50 to 70 times the numbers in 1949 (700,000 to 1 million), in spite of 13 years of eradication measures taken by the government in the 1960s and 70s (p.427). The underground church fights daily against repressive and harsh governmental control.

The government has a tight control over the church in regards to who becomes clergy. Though there is a clergy shortage in China, only seminary-trained people can become ministers (Yang 2005). This allows the government to manage what these individuals learn and what they teach—and what not to teach. The police often hunt down and punish those who do not hold official certificates, which include Chinese and foreign missionaries. No one, including those with official certificates to preach, is allowed to preach outside the church premises. There is a shortage in the number of churches as well. Many churches have trouble getting permission to open their doors, or keep them opened, due to heavy restrictions on preaching styles and the use of monetary contributions (Yang). Despite these reasons, among many more, the underground church is thriving despite harsh penalties by the government when they are discovered. Christianity has experienced vast changes in the last decade, including

receptiveness, interest, and adoption by many Chinese. Conversion in China could now be considered mass conversion (Yang and Tamney). This is a “newer,” non-traditional, non-Western Christianity; opposed to that which missionaries spread but were never able to separate Westernization from it. This “newer” Christianity is swiftly becoming globally dominant; replacing the previously dominant region of Europe and the United States.

A Power Shift: China as a New Global Leader in Christianity

As China becomes an economic world leader, it is also forecasted to become a leader in the Christian realm. As mentioned earlier, 65 percent of the world’s Christians now live in the Southern Hemisphere and in East Asia, areas that have become Christianity’s new frontier (Sanneh 2006: 120). Yang quotes Bays, saying that “today, on any given Sunday, there are almost certainly more Protestants in church in China than in all of Europe” (Bays 2003: 448). It is interesting to note that this shift from numbers of adherents to Christianity is toward China both due to great increases in numbers in China and decreases in Europe. According to Pingree and Lyman, the percentage of people who rarely or never attend church has increased by five percent for Western Europe, Canada, and the United States. The reasons for this decline are the increase in rise in affluence, decline fertility rates, and rise in secular and secular trends (Pingree and Lyman). As Christianity is now seen as traditional and out-of-touch, it is quite the opposite in China today.

Scholars (Aikman 2003; Lambert 1999) have predicted that within the next thirty years, one-third of China’s population could become Christian, which would make China one of the largest Christian nations in the world. This would greatly influence global politics and the global economy; as a large portion of current Christian converts are college educated and/or already part of the CCP. China becoming a global leader would have potential to change the current standing of many nations all over the world. Sanneh mentions that China’s potential global role as a Christian society would be to contribute unprecedented resources to the betterment of society in this increasingly interdependent

world. "China's contribution to the Christian moral investment in the welfare of the world and the prevalence of peace would be an invaluable asset in a new international order underpinned by movements for freedom, peace, justice, the rule of law, and mutual respect (p 126)." The future of Christianity seems to point toward East Asia and South America, and China plays a particularly important role regarding this growth.

Conclusion

Like so many developing nations, China's history is comprised of war, turmoil, natural disasters, corruption, and foreign domination. But conversely, it is also comprised of a strong traditional culture that allowed it to survive and adapt to those significant events. The Chinese were able to reject Christianity when Christianization and Westernization were one in the same, but were able to adapt Christianity to their own culture during a time of religious suppression and political isolation. Western missionaries were unable to make many converts due to the traditional Chinese views regarding foreign religions and their inability to separate their religion from their Western cultures. The Western world, therefore, had been largely unsuccessful at converting and establishing Christianity in China before all foreigners were expelled. During the difficulties of the early -1900s, Christianity went underground with traditional Catholic families and Protestant churches in urban areas.

Christianity began to be embraced throughout the mid-1900s as Chinese were able to adapt the religion to the culture. Conversion of many Chinese was aided by the long history of suffering and uncertainty. The Chinese were able to convert their peers as they took on the duty of evangelism themselves, without the presence or help of Western aid. More Chinese became receptive toward Christianity as the economy became more open and regulations on religion were lessened. Churches were opened and clergy were reinstated. Difficulties and uncertainties in the global market helped to push some Chinese toward seeking a meaningful belief system; and the growth of Chinese adherents has grown rapidly since the 1980s.

This growth has aided China in becoming a growing leader in global Christianity, which could drastically change the way the government is run and, in turn, the way it deals with the world. I have argued that the growth of Christianity in China is unique, especially in regard to its traditional status. China's place in the world is rapidly changing, and with the growth of Christianity in China, this could change how the government and society relates to the world. China has potential for great leadership in the world. With the current views of many Chinese Christian adherents, and these Chinese entering leadership roles in the government and global corporations, this may become reality. More research is required to understand the dynamic roles of Christianity, China, and China's changing role in the world. An understanding of China's history, Christianity's role in that history, and the changing attitudes of the Chinese is needed to further research the role of the religion in China. This may also be a predictor for similar situations in nations around the globe, and if so, more research would be needed to understand why and what it would mean for this increasingly connected world. Christianity has had a unique place in China's history; and as it stands, it will continue to have a unique place in China in the indefinite future.

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